

The Builder.

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OME one says, "Time is money;" we say, it is something better still,—it is money and much more. Time is priceless, not to be bought,—and involves culture, progress, wisdom, good. When school-boys, we wrote, "Life is short and art is long," and we feel the truth of the apothegm every day of our life more strongly. The Londoners, however, can scarcely agree with us, or they would surely not suffer so much time to be wasted in the streets, as is now the case, for want of thoroughfares proportioned to the enormous and ever-increasing traffic of this wonderful metropolis. If we deduct the time spent in eating and drinking, sleeping, buttoning and unbuttoning (wrote Byron, in other words), how little is left for the real business of life! Those who make a periodical journey through the city, must add it to the list of deductions, and make an allowance for the wear of the spirits caused by the forced detention.

A few days ago, while locked up in Gracechurch-street, where we stood motionless for twenty-five minutes, "by Shrewsbury clock," we made an approximate calculation of the time lost annually, for want of proper road room. The result was startling; as our readers may see, if they call to mind that less than 9,000 hours make a year, and that if only double that number of persons lose half an hour in the day, more than 300 years of active life are wasted within the twelvemonth.

This is very far from the amount of time really wasted (satisfy yourself of it, curious reader, by calculating the number of persons in every yard of road, when you are next compelled to creep from the Poultry to St. Paul's), and although it may be laughed at as fanciful, unquestionably deserves to be remembered.

Attention is now evidently awakened to the subject, and it is to be hoped that the efforts about to be made to lessen the evil complained of, will be in the right direction.

The commencement proposed by the City Improvement Committee appears to us far from satisfactory; it being clear, that after the 25,000*l.* are spent, much more must be done before the slightest improvement will be found in the existing thoroughfares. If they had even commenced at the other end of their proposed improvement, and formed the direct line from the south side of St. Paul's to Cannon-street, some relief would have been given to Cheapside; but as it is, years will elapse, and none will be felt. A member of the Improvement Committee, who wrote to *The Times* on the subject, says the proposal is only part of a much more extensive plan, on which the public are not informed; but the few particulars into which he goes are far from sufficient to assure us of the wisdom of the plan, even when all carried out. What we want are direct and straight lines of communication in the right direction,—not angles and windings for the sake of existing interests. We know it costs large sums in the first instance, to make entirely new thoroughfares, but the perfect thing is the cheapest thing in the end, and unless the alterations are to be made in the best manner (allowing nothing to interfere with this requirement), it will be

better not to attempt them at all, as what is done will stand in the way of more far-seeing improvers who may come hereafter.*

We long ago urged the importance of having a general scheme, for the improvement of the metropolis, prepared by the most competent persons in no way interested, and with reference solely to the advantage of the public, so that all partial improvements, afterwards proposed by individual interests, might be tested by it, and modified accordingly. We shall return to this very important point on another occasion.

There is little doubt that if such a plan was prepared, a road from the end of Cheapside across Farringdon-street to the end of Long-acre, so as to unite with the improvements at the end of Piccadilly, would appear upon it. The advantages of such a line are too obvious to need comment.

Another much called for improvement, the widening of the Poultry, could be accomplished with less difficulty, and would afford an immediate and most important relief.

The removal of that abominable nuisance, Holborn-hill, is loudly called for. If we may judge from the number of letters we have received, relating to its remedy, a very large section of the public feel interested in the matter. One correspondent suggests the simple course of lowering the brow of the hill, as constantly seen in country roads, so as to render the ascent more gradual—the foot pavements to remain as they are, and retaining walls built to keep them up, and form the end of vaults under them, with a parapet on the top for the protection of foot-passengers. "The water and gas-pipes would require to be lowered," continues the writer, "but there would be no interference with property, and the expense would be less than that of any other scheme for the same end, which has been laid before the public."

There are some obvious objections to the course proposed, the most weighty of which is, that it could but partially lessen the evil, not remove it.

A writer in *The Times*, who sees the absolute necessity of doing something here, if it be but to lessen the number of broken-kneed horses, suggests that the road should be made like the tooth of an elephant, full of ridges, which would keep themselves rough. "And how is this to be accomplished?" he asks; "why, in the simplest of all manners. The tooth of almost every vegetable feeder is composed of alternate plates of hard and soft material, placed vertically. During the attrition necessary to grind the food, the one wears much more readily than the other, and, as a consequence, it keeps up a constantly roughened surface. Apply this principle to the hill in question: suppose it were paved with alternate rows of soft and hard stone, say granite and Portland, or granite and wood,—the one would wear much faster than the other, and would necessarily keep up a constantly rough surface, from the ridges or projections of the unworn granite. In applying this principle, however, it would be proper to have the softer material laid in thin rows, as from one to two inches, or the roughening would be greater than desirable."

This, again, is but a palliative, and that, too, of only one of the evils. More is demanded; and that is, a road as nearly level as can be obtained. One correspondent, whose letter we print below, urges the advantages of a viaduct

* Since this was written a meeting has been held in the ward of Farringdon-without, Sir Jas. Duke in the chair, to oppose the proposed measure; and resolutions were passed to that effect.

from Holborn-hill to Snow-hill, crossing the end of Farringdon-street, as proposed by Mr. Stead, and which certainly affords the main requirement. The financial details of the scheme we have not seen.*

Circumstances are favourable at this moment to the improvement of Holborn, and, it is to be hoped, will be taken advantage of. The Official Referees have just now confirmed the condemnation of some of the houses in Middle-row, unless certain specified works, amounting almost to a rebuilding, be done; and this, therefore, is the right time to treat for their purchase, with the view of getting rid of the whole block of houses which now stand so much in the way. To suffer them to be rebuilt, and the nuisance perpetuated, would be really disgraceful.

In Field-lane, too, as our readers know, many of the houses are to come down; and at the last meeting of the Court of Common Council, a motion,—That the greater portion of the houses in Field-lane being condemned by the district surveyor under the Building Act, the same be included in the proposed bill for the improvement at Holborn-bridge,—was referred to a committee for consideration.

Widen, however, and improve the roads through London as we may, we shall still be liable to stoppages, and the loss of time consequent on devious wanderings through back ways, until improvements are effected in our mode of paving, and we have a better arrangement of sewers, water-mains, and gas-pipes. The experience of the last twelve months is sufficient to appeal to; and the annoyance and loss from which we have just got free in Piccadilly and Fleet-street, through the repaving of the roads, may be partially forced upon us again in a week, should a larger water-main be required, or the escape of gas, now going on to an immense extent, enforce a general examination of the pipe; as it ought, unquestionably, to induce a better system of laying them, in all places where new ones are required.

A sub-way or tunnel, in connection with the sewers, wherein the pipes could be laid, and afterwards examined and repaired, without breaking up the road, would seem to be too costly to be expedient. We have little doubt, however, that in the long run money would be saved to the community by such a course. How long it will be before we have railway-streets it can scarcely be said; it may not be long before we have, at all events, such as are required to connect all the existing lines into

* *Athenaeum* Club, Oct. 24, 1846.
SIR,—As a constant reader and subscriber of your valuable publication,—valuable to the public as useful to the architect,—I have read the ideas of "A Citizen" on the thoroughfares of the city with pleasure. He does not, however, seem aware, that by a promising project suggested by Mr. Stead, civil engineer, for a viaduct to demolish the nuisance of Holborn-hill, the proposed company will remove the projections complained of by your correspondents gratuitously, and without expense to the city. Having examined Mr. Stead's plans, I can say, that the hitherto difficult problem of removing the obstruction at Snow-hill for an easy communication between the eastern and western parts of the metropolis has been simply solved. Having a knowledge of most of the capitals of Europe, I can affirm with confidence, that London would then boast an uninterrupted line of traffic nearly across its greatest extent, from east to west, unrivalled in the modern as in the ancient world. Mr. Piersbury may boast its Prospect, but they run principally through woods and wastes. The *Federata Strada* at Berlin is long, but its sides have in a great measure only houses, or rather cottages, on each side. The *Cité de Toledo*, at Naples, is open on one side to the sea,—in fact, only a magnificent shore-side promenade; and, not to weary your readers with instances, the *Paseo de Madrid* is but a large ride, like Hyde-park. How then could they compare with the line beginning at Kensington Palace along Hyde-park, through old Oxford-street and its superb new promenade, on the site of ancient St. Giles's through Holborn, and at the *Fleet-hill*, carried on a level through to the opposite side a Newgate-street, at various points on the *Christ Church* side, where symptoms of enlargement, whence the magnificent top of Cheapside, the Mansion House, Bank, and Exchange are successively passed in a straight line to the India House. I must confess, that as you say, the reduction of Middle-row, and perhaps the removal or widening of the street at the Poultry, are desiderata in this extent: but most of all, the last only unobtainable but dangerous activity at Fleet Market, where a gradient is offered, to the largest traffic in the world, that is a disgrace to the country, and could not have been permitted in any other capital. A CORRESPONDENT.